

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's shoulder and back. The person has long, dark, wet hair that is dripping with liquid, possibly water or oil, which is catching the light. On their left shoulder, there is a large, dark tattoo. The tattoo consists of a crown at the top, two crossed axes or spears in the middle, and a complex, snowflake-like or floral design at the bottom. The background is a solid, deep blue.

EXCERPT

sweetest kiss

book three of THE REBEL COURT series

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author of BASTIEN and THE BEAST

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM AN ALIANNE DONNELLY BOOK. PUBLISHED BY ALIANNE DONNELLY. It's not bragging if it's true.

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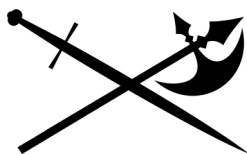
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Rebel heroes deserve rebel dedications. With that in mind...

This story is dedicated to the author. Because so few books are...



CHAPTER 1



O*h my gods, did you see? Sebastian Collins is back again!"*
Sebastian worked his boots off, trying not to grit his teeth. His jaw already ached enough as it was.

Another voice chimed in, *"I see him in the common room a few times a week. What's the big deal?"*

Second boot off. He aligned it with the first at the foot of the bed, rolled his shoulders, and winced. His bones were starting to feel tight. *Come on, what's the hold-up?*

"Girls draw straws to see who'll get to have him. He's so good, they do him for free, and Miss Kiki lets them!"

"You know why, though, right?"

Shouldn't walls in a brothel be thick enough to muffle sound? Sebastian crossed to the wash basin by the window and splashed cold water on his face.

"They say that years ago, he was a page in the castle. He was so beautiful, King Edgar's knights were jealous of him—and he was only sixteen!"

The basin rocked sharply in his grasp, splashing water onto the vanity.

"Even Queen Zorana lost her head when she saw him. After she offed

her husband, she tried to seduce him, but Sebastian blew her off. She got so mad she cursed him to feel increasingly more pain until it killed him unless he came back to please her. So he literally has to make a girl come, as many times as she wants until she's satisfied."

"But Zorana is dead. Didn't the curse die with her?"

"No one knows. Some say she used raw magic and it warped inside him. Others say it was flawed from the beginning because he never went back to her, but he's still alive."

The other girl scoffed. *"Faery tales."*

"No, it's true! I—"

A delicate knock on the door heralded his healer for the day. "Hello, lover."

Her voice immediately silenced the new girls next door, and Sebastian put them out of his mind at once. "Good morrow, Lacie."

She smiled softly. "You know, you're the only one who ever says that anymore? So old-fashioned." Today, her lips were painted a delicate pink, and her jet black hair was loose, trailing down her back in a smooth, straight fall. Minimal makeup to go with the soft, white silk dress that almost reached her knees. She'd gone for the innocent look, likely for one of her repeat customers. Sebastian didn't have a preference.

"I like to think it's classy. Shall we?"

"Let's."

Sebastian let her lie back on the bed, then shucked out of his leather tunic and undid the buttons on his shirt. His knuckles were starting to lock. Ignoring the pain and the creaking friction in his knees and hips, Sebastian knelt between Lacie's legs and inched the hem of her dress up her thighs. With a kiss to each of her knees, he slid his hands higher to hook his fingers into the waistline of her panties, drawing them down.

"So what are you in the mood for today?"

Lacie shrugged. "You know what I like."

Yeah, he did. For all of her popularity at Miss Kiki's as the blowjob queen of Kesteran, Lacie's preferences leaned more toward women than men. That was why Sebastian requested her as often as possible. A woman who liked his mouth on her was less likely to want

his cock.

They had developed a sort of pleasant rhythm between them over the years. Sebastian knew what pleased Lacie, and in turn, she knew what to expect from him to the point where her body was almost trained to get wet for him as soon as she walked through the door. No complications, no exorbitant demands. Just a conversation between friends.

He could already feel Lacie's pulse racing where he held the back of her knee. Her nipples beaded against the silk of her dress, begging to be played with. Lacie herself did the honors, massaging her small breasts, pinching those nipples. She presented a picture straight out of a man's fantasies.

Sebastian remained completely unaffected. "Part your pretty thighs for me some more."

Lacie let her legs fall open, baring her sex to him. As most of the girls here, she was completely smooth, the lips of her sex already glistening. He kissed his way up the inside of her right thigh, licked the crease of her loin, then trailed open-mouthed kisses across her abdomen and back down the other side.

"Sebastian, please. Don't tease me today."

"Right you are, sweet." He didn't have time to play, anyway. Not if he wanted to make it to the castle on time for the Rebels' audience with Queen Snow. She so rarely called on them all at once, and the invitation was so vague, Sebastian half expected her to announce they were going to war again.

I'd welcome it.

"Hold on tight, sweet."

In answer, Lacie threaded her fingers through his hair, mewling his name. Sebastian set his mouth on her, licking sucking, nipping, until she writhed beneath him. He took his time to amp up her pleasure before he let her take it. Quick orgasms didn't do the trick. Better to work his partner up a little, or a lot, depending on how bad a state he was in.

Lacie's legs closed around him, she rocked her hips up to him, and he caught them firmly to keep her still as he flicked his tongue over her clit. When he felt her muscles clench, on the verge of coming, he

eased off, let her come down a little before he set in again. He did it again, and again, until Lacie thrashed her head, begging him to let her come.

With one finger against her G-spot, he rubbed circles over her clit, breathing a covert sigh of relief as pleasure rocked her and the ache in his bones eased. But she wasn't finished yet, so neither was he. Keeping up a steady rhythm, he fucked her with his fingers, smoothly bringing her from one orgasm right into the next.

He didn't stop until she reached down with a shaky hand and pushed him away. "Gods, 'bastian. I feel like I should be paying you for that."

"I live to please," he answered with enough sarcasm to make it sound serious.

In her current, boneless state, Lacie took him at his word and smiled. "Shall I return the favor?" To her credit, she did make an attempt to reach for him, but like a drunk whose depth perception had been eroded hours ago, she ended up waving her hand in the air two feet in front of him.

Sebastian checked his watch. *Shit!* "Love to, sweet. Some other time, though."

"*Anytime*, lover."

Sebastian washed up, shoved his feet into his boots, grabbed his tunic, and went out the door, ignoring the dreamy looks and sighs the new girls gave him as he brushed past them. He jogged down the stairway, across the common room and out to the parking lot. The driver's side door of his sleek, black sports car opened with the push of a button and he ducked in easily, gunning the engine before the automatic door had even closed all the way.

With two minutes to spare, he pulled into the castle's courtyard and jumped out, engine still running for the valet to take over. He arrived at the boardroom in time for the grandfather clock to toll the hour and for Snow's ancient herald to appear and intone, "Her Majesty thanks you for your audience." All of Snow White's Rebel Court was in attendance, all of them standing to attention, ready to follow the herald inside, but he stayed them. "One at a time, if you please. Her Majesty will see Master Haig first."

Sebastian raised an eyebrow at that. What the hell was going on? His comrades seemed to be thinking the same, looking at each other in question, except Haig, who apparently thought this was hilarious. "I'll try not to wear her out too much." *Only Haig...*

When the door closed once more, the rest of them resumed their seats to wait for their turns.

"You cut it close," Declan told Sebastian in an aside.

"Couldn't be helped." Though he'd have appreciated Snow giving them a copy of whatever schedule she was working with so the rest of them didn't need to waste time waiting.

"Any change?" As their healer, Declan Rave didn't acknowledge the term "lost cause" as part of his vast vocabulary of medical definitions.

"Nope," Sebastian answered, the same way he always did. Even with Declan's...unconventional way of manipulating magic, he'd been unable to do shit about Sebastian's curse, so why he would expect the damned thing to change on its own, Sebastian didn't know. "Any new leads?"

Declan shook his head. "I keep searching, but nothing has come up yet." Which was healer-talk for "I have thirty possible theories to explore, but can't test any of them without potentially killing the subject so I won't even mention them." Declan still had hope for a cure. Sebastian had lost his a long time ago.

They fell into an uneasy silence after that, unbroken even by Beau's summons into the boardroom. Neither he nor Haig had yet come back out, which didn't bode well. He'd love to know what their lovely queen was up to.

Several minutes later, the door opened once more, and the herald called Sebastian by name. Sebastian stood, adjusting his white uniform. He'd left the top two buttons of his shirt undone; he doubted Snow would notice or care.

"Whatever this is about," Declan said, halting Sebastian in his tracks, "Be wary. I sense deep turmoil in our queen."

Frowning, Sebastian nodded and followed the herald into the boardroom. This was where Snow kept an eye on the welfare of Valefort. Today, the queen's brow furrowed unhappily as she watched the financial market lines dip and rise in real time on the monitors.

Beau had left his mark in the form of a stack of files and reports. It was a sign of Snow's deep respect for her master strategist that she'd left them on the table instead of shoving them all off into the trash bin as Sebastian would have done. Gods love that nerd, but he needed to cut down on his paper consumption.

"My queen looks troubled."

Snow White tore her gaze away from the monitors to face him. As always, an unspoken salute passed between them, an acknowledgment of their past, and the secrets they carried for each other. "Thank you for coming."

Sebastian bowed in answer. "Always a pleasure to see you. Shall we sit?"

She made no move to resume her seat. "Do you trust me, Sebastian?"

"Of course," he answered without hesitation.

"Do you trust me with your life?"

Sebastian tilted his head, but answered truthfully, "Yes."

Some of the tension left her shoulders, but her frown deepened. "I don't have official crown business to send you on," she said after a pause. "But yours might be the most dangerous mission of all. Are you prepared to obey, no matter the risk to yourself?"

"Just tell me what you want me to do." Snow had earned the unquestioning loyalty of every one of her Rebel Court many times over, but none owed her a greater debt than Sebastian. If she asked him to jump off the top of the bell tower, he'd do it gladly.

"I want you to heal," Snow replied.

Sebastian almost laughed. "I would if I could."

Snow crossed to the side cabinet and opened it onto an impressive stash of hard liquor. Lifting the edge of the tray, she slipped her hand underneath and withdrew a plain white envelope. She held it with both hands for a moment, as if waging some internal battle, then came back and handed it to him.

The name on it read Willow Faithblade. "Anyone I know?"

"Marcus' very distant cousin, on his mother's side."

Sebastian raised an eyebrow. "You're sending me to Sturmgard?"

Snow shook her head. "No, she's in Valefort. From what I was able

to find out, Willow is the last living female descendant of Alvina Ericksson, Marcus' five times great aunt."

"Then she will be the last living Ericksson to carry their gift." Marcus' family possessed a unique immunity to the side effects of raw magic. All magic came at a price, and the more one used, the greater the risk of it going very wrong, but the Ericksson line was somehow able to draw on and manipulate raw magic without being adversely affected by it. The gift was genetically passed down from mother to daughter, and dictated their right to rule Sturmgard.

Sometimes, as in Marcus' case, a quirk of fate or love allowed a son the use of this gift as an extension of his mother's, but only for as long as she lived. When Marcus' mother, Ianna, had died, her magic had, as well.

The problem was, the Ericksson line had run out of female descendants with Ianna and, when attempt after attempt to replicate their ability artificially had failed, the burden of finding a different solution had fallen onto Marcus. That solution had been a merger with Valefort and the start of a thriving magic refinery business.

"But wait, if she's a legitimate heir, why wasn't she put forth to take over for Ianna?"

"Because she's only legitimate genetically," Snow replied. "The magic follows the blood, but the crown doesn't. Alvina was disinherited and banished from Sturmgard forever. Funny thing is, we know she and all of her future descendants were shunned by her family, but we don't know why."

"Must have been bad for them to resort to such drastic measures."

"That's what I'm thinking. In the entire history of the Ericksson royal line, there is no other record of a banishment before Alvina or since."

"And we found out about all this how?"

"Divine intervention," Snow retorted. "When Marcus turned down Zorana's offer of marriage, she set her bloodhounds on the trail of anyone else she could use instead. They were the ones who tracked down Willow but, by then, Zorana was already beaten."

Which meant Zorana hadn't had time to sink her claws into the woman and corrupt her. And that meant this Willow Faithblade now

presented a real chance of lifting Zorana's curse from Sebastian.

He tried and failed to contain the spark of hope flaring into life inside him. *It won't work*, he told himself, even as his palm started to sweat, holding the envelope. *It never does.*

As if she sensed his growing excitement, Snow said, "There's a catch."

Sebastian couldn't prevent a sneer. "Of course there is."

"After so many years, we have no way of knowing whether Willow is even aware of her heritage, let alone how to use it."

"One way to find out."

She winced. "Yeah, that's the other catch. Open the envelope."

He did. It contained one piece of paper with a set of coordinates. "I'm not gonna like this, am I?"

The queen of Valefort shook her head. "We tracked her down in the White Plains. The good townsfolk of Icerton refer to her as 'that ghoulish in the castle,' which we assume is the Helegert keep."

"You mean the Helegert *ruin*." This just got better and better. "So I fly out there—"

"You can't fly. Or drive."

"What? Why the hell not?"

"Because there are no air fields up there, and only a handful of gas stations. The White Plains storms routinely wipe out entire roadways and disrupt any kind of transmissions, and this year they seem to be worse than ever. You can probably drive up as far as Oberland, but you'll need a horse and carriage the rest of the way."

Sebastian gaped at her. "I'm supposed to *ride* through the White Plains?"

Snow dropped her gaze for a moment, then looked back at him, her expression grave and serious. "This could very well be the last chance we'll have of ever setting you to rights again."

I know that! "It could also be a very quick and painful way to kill me."

"Yes." Well, at least she didn't try to lie. "I sent word ahead to prepare Willow for your arrival. She received all known details of your condition and past treatment attempts, so hopefully, she's already working on it, and you won't have to spend too much time there."

Well, fan-fucking-tastic. “Does Marcus know about this?”

“Of course he knows. I’m not going to go behind his back to contact the black sheep of his family without his permission.”

“And he’s on board?”

“We both agree that the risk is worth the potential benefit to you. Also, Marcus is hoping you can persuade Willow to ‘migrate south’ to meet him. He’d go to her himself but, without knowing the details of Alvina’s banishment, he’s afraid Willow will see his visit as an act of aggression. She is the only member of Ianna’s family he has left now.”

Then Marcus’ request was a much bigger deal than Snow implied. “I thought you said this wasn’t official crown business.”

“It isn’t. It’s a request for a favor. And only if and after Willow can fix you.”

Right. Because if she couldn’t, Sebastian wouldn’t live long enough to complete that favor.

But what if...?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALIANNE DONNELLY was a wordsmith long before she became a reader. Driven by an insatiable curiosity about everything from history and mythology to science and philosophy, she grew into a fiction writer who hates coloring inside the genre lines. Her books all have elements of romance, with different series sorted under paranormal, science fiction, fantasy, and erotic. And then there's *Wolfen*...

Alianne lives in California, doing hard time in a corporate 9-5, while secretly scribbling away any chance she gets. She loves pizza, hiking, and avoiding small talk, and hopes to one day win the lottery jackpot.

A romantic couple embracing in a close, intimate pose. The woman is on the left, wearing a purple halter-neck top, and the man is on the right, shirtless. They are both looking down, and the man's hands are wrapped around the woman's waist. The background is dark and moody.

sweetest kiss

Long ago, Sebastian denied the evil queen, and she struck him with a terrible curse. His body is wracked with constant pain that grows increasingly worse the longer he goes without pleasuring a woman. The curse should have died with the queen. Except it didn't, and every attempt to remove it has failed. Now Sebastian is being sent on a long journey to the desolate north to retrieve a woman who might or might not be his last hope for a cure.

But magic is a complicated thing, especially when wielded by the awkward, beautiful hermit who haunts the ruins of an abandoned castle during the day and invades Sebastian's lurid dreams at night. After a lifetime of feeling nothing but pain, the powerful desire he suddenly feels for Willow defies all reason. And Sebastian can't help thinking he just traded one curse for another.

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